

THE Possibilities of Palestine.

*(An Address delivered before the London Zionist
League, Sunday, February 5th, 1905)*

BY
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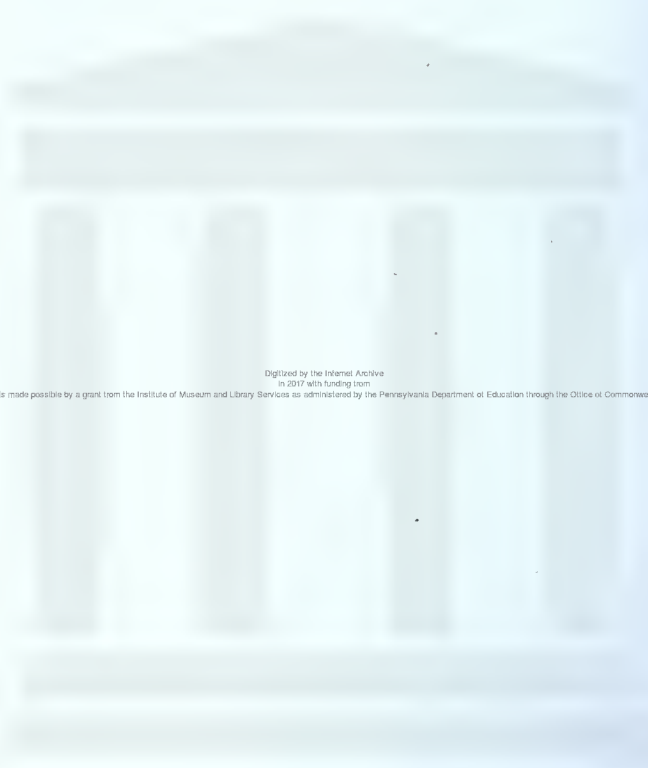
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THE POSSIBILITIES OF PALESTINE.

Soc. Bone

THE subject I have chosen may be divided into four heads. I propose, first of all, to treat it in regard to Palestine, secondly, in regard to the European attitude to Palestine, then as regards the Turkish attitude to Palestine, and finally the Jewish attitude. When I made enquiries about your league I was told that you stuck to the original objects of the movement, and were determined to work for Zion. I thought I saw in that the spirit in which great enterprises are brought to a successful termination. When Jeremiah was advising his people that they might have to wait, but that the time would come when they would go back to Palestine, no statesman or politician could have foreseen that, in time, there would

arise a tolerant king who, in the first year of his reign, gave them the required permission to return, so that Ezra led the people back. And when opposition came upon you, a great leader, Judas Macca-bæus, set you free. These men bided their time, but they did not wait until the end of all things, but set to work to do what they could in all the circumstances. The grand symbols of future happiness and prosperity used by the ancient rabbis do not apply to the age in which we are living. We are living in a grey world, and the greater number of us are very hungry and anxious to know how we and our children are to live.

I think of that great crowd of your poor coreligionists herded on the west frontier of Russia and Galicia. There are, I believe, some who think that this Zionist movement may be premature, but we know that it is the duty, and that it is the wisdom, of the rich and the well-to-do to help their poor brethren, and this is not

a question of anything in the way of attempting to induce people to go to Palestine. If they are comfortable in the lands in which they live and they wish to remain, Zionists will not interfere with them. It is not even a question of trying to persuade anyone to go to Palestine; it is a question of dealing with this large mass of your poor brethren who are continually asking to be helped to go to Palestine. These poor people are driven out of Russia with great cruelty, and when they are on the other side of the border they find anti-Semitism waiting for them. Fortunately, anti-Semitism has no hold in England. I do not think that England will ever shut her doors to an industrious and temperate people who desire to work in peace in England, but there is no doubt the world is filling up very fast, and the question is in what parts are the surplus populations to find a home? Some say that there are various delightful regions in

West Africa, East Africa, and other places. I have been in some of these. But my impression is that the first strong races took the best countries, and drove to the worse countries the weaker races. The old countries are, therefore, the best countries.

When I went to Palestine first there were several things that struck me. One was that it is a good land. If I had always been living in the green fields of England I might not have formed that opinion at first. But I was brought up as a boy in the south of Italy, and Palestine is a country capable of being made as fertile and prosperous as the South of Italy, or the plains of Sicily. It is a good land, and it is an empty land. There are more than ten times more people living in London than in the whole of Palestine even at the present day. It has room for a large, but energetic, population. I lived in the heart of the Jewish quarter in Jerusalem amongst your poor-

est brethren. I went to the synagogues, and spent Passover at the Chief Rabbi's house, and I observed them for months. I was struck by the fact that they are the most energetic and most likely population to do the work of restoring the country. And when you come to think of it, it is one of the most extraordinary things in the history of the world that a nation like yours, one in religion, one by blood, one in your sacred language, decidedly a nation, should yet be a people which really has a national country known and recognized by all the world. Its history is known. It is known that Palestine is the home of the Jew. It is good to cherish the idea of going home. There are a great many Englishmen who do not remain in England. Every nation spreads to other countries. But almost every other nation has a national centre, and the spirit of nationalism has gradually increased all over Europe. All other nations have been cultivating it.

I ought to explain to you how it was I first took an interest in Zionism. I have been in South Africa, and I did something there for the oppressed natives of the country; I have been in Ireland, and did considerable work for the Irish, but, at the same time, the first beginning of my work was in Palestine, and you do get an interest in a country which you have known for nearly seven years. I wrote something about it in my first book which attracted the *Jewish Chronicle's* attention, and I was asked to write those papers, and I wrote them. While doing that I believe the first Zionist came to the conclusion that he would attempt to carry into practice what I was writing about. The first small colony was formed at Safed, and since then I have watched the movement growing.

We know how an idea develops. An idea first of all exists in the minds of one or two, and then it is a fad; afterwards a certain number of people take an

interest in it, and then it is a craze; more people become interested in it, and then it is a nuisance; a very large number of people become interested in it, and then it is a danger; finally, if it is a real idea, and not a sham one, it becomes a fact, and one thinks what a remarkably stupid age it was when people objected to this excellent idea.

I am not going to say anything against enthusiasm. No great work was ever done unless it began with enthusiasm. I do not myself see why there should not arise an Ezra or Judas Maccabæus in the future as in the past if you recognize him in time. I will not refer to extraneous questions. I stood on Mount Zion and surveyed Palestine, but if Mount Zion is reached by a railroad from the Zanzibar coast I must be wrong. I do not wish to hamper anyone that desires to help the nation. If there are those who wish to go to East Africa it is a good thing. Personally, I do not intend to go

to East Africa. I once had an engineer working under me who went to East Africa to survey for the Uganda railway, and at one point in the jungle they came upon sixteen lions.

Palestine is a good land; it is a land of corn and wine and olives, and the soil is what it ever was. The ancient nations did not fight one another for deserts, they fought for the good lands, and Palestine was a coveted land. When Abraham first went to Palestine it was held by the Babylonians. When the Israelites were in Egypt it was held by the Egyptians; your own ancestors prospered under David and Solomon, and every man lived under his own vine and fig-tree. Every race coveted it, and it was conquered by the Assyrians, the Babylonians, and the Persians. When Alexander the Great set out to conquer Asia, one of the first things he did was to take Palestine. The Arabs, when they were engaged on their conquests, first took Palestine, and then when

they prospered and became weak Europe became aware that it was a good land, and preached a crusade for twenty years, and the Christians held it for two hundred years; they colonized it, and it was happier and more prosperous at that time than any part of Europe.

Historically, then, Palestine is a coveted land because it is a good land. I also say so from my own knowledge of the country. If you land at Jaffa, and go by railway to Jerusalem, you may think you have been deceived. You see a brown plain, and very rocky mountains, and you pass through probably one of the most rocky parts of the whole country. But you should live in the country in the great green plains where there should be corn, but which are now covered with narcissi and other flowers; you should wander in the woods of Mount Gilead, with its many oak-trees and brooks of water—Gilead always appears in the Scriptures as one of the most picturesque and poetical parts of the country; you should

see the oak-trees in Galilee, and the beautiful range of Lebanon. In the great corn plains we could grow as much corn as we find hard to get from Russia or India. The country is opening up; changes are occurring; those colonies which did not exist when I first wrote on the subject have struggled into existence. On these colonies a generation has sprung up strong and hardy while their town-bred fathers are anything but satisfactory in physical strength. There are now ten times as many Jews in Palestine as when I first went to the country. This is due partly to the persecutions in Russia, but it is also due to the growing interest and enthusiasm for a return to their own country among the Jews who would be happier in any other than in a Christian country. This is a very remarkable point. In the travels of Benjamin of Tudela, the only part of the world where he found few Jews was in Palestine, where the Normans were holding the whole country. The moment he got outside the

influence of Christian domination he found very rich and prosperous Jews all over Babylonia, Persia; and even in Central Asia they were prosperous traders and cultivators.

The subject of Mohammedan domination presents no real difficulty as compared with the difficulties you know well in the case of Russia and other countries governed as Christian countries. Of course, there are difficulties. I hold that Dr. Herzl was perfectly right when he laid down the idea of an autonomous Jewish State. It is a very bold thing to say, and it may cause difficulties for a time. But, whatever name you call it, it is the national idea which made and kept Israel a nation during the years since his nationality was crushed by Rome. There are difficulties, but we know if we face difficulties they become smaller, and if you go on dealing wisely with your difficulties they disappear.

There may be statesmen who say you had very much better leave it alone, and

not raise this Palestinian question. It is a very awkward question, but leaving things alone generally makes all the more trouble in the long run. The formation of the Lebanon province was one of the things which induced me to think that a Jewish province might also be formed in Palestine. The gradual dismemberment of the Turkish Empire in Europe must have some influence in the immediate future on the West of Asia. One cannot foresee what in a few years' time may be the result of the great events happening in Russia. There is a very practical reason why the Russians must always take an interest in Palestine. From their Trans-Caucasian provinces the shortest route to the Mediterranean leads through Palestine. They have worked for years towards acquiring the Holy Land for themselves. As to Germany, I do not think that the interests of that country and His Majesty the Emperor are other than religious, and I do not perceive any intention on the part of Germany to get

hold of the country. Since the days of Napoleon's conquest of Palestine, and the days of Napoleon III., who sent troops after the massacres of Damascus, the French have always cherished the idea of a possible reversion of Palestine to themselves. England cannot be entirely indifferent to the subject of Palestine, because it is next door to Egypt and the Suez Canal. We cannot tell, therefore, what the history of the future may be, all these nations being equally interested in Palestine. It seems to me that the solution of these rivalries and ambitions consists in the neutralisation of Palestine, which should be made into a West Asian Switzerland; but a West Asian Switzerland must have a population; and who have more right to the country than the ancient race to which it belonged?

It is no use, however, blinking the difficulties that stand in the way; we must acknowledge the difficulties and understand them. There is no doubt that the Turks are the main difficulty. His

Majesty the Sultan is a sincere Moham-
medan, and not only the political ruler
of a large empire, which extends to the
boundaries of Persia, but the head of the
Mohammedan religion, the Khalif and
successor of Mohammed. He is acknowl-
edged as such by nearly all the Moham-
medans in the world. The Khalif is sup-
posed to be in possession of the sanc-
tuaries of Mecca and Jerusalem, and
as long as the Sultan remains the head of
Western Islam and the ruler of his
Empire, he has a very particuar reason
for wishing to retain Jerusalem. I think
that if you go to him in the first instance,
and say, "We wish to form an autono-
mous province in Palestine," the Sultan
will say politely, "Do you?" And if you
offer to buy Palestine he will reply, like
Naboth, that he is not inclined to sell the
inheritance of his fathers. You must
look at things from the Sultan's point of
view, and if he will not give you permis-
sion to set up an autonomous State in
Palestine, you are not in a position to

force him to do so. But you should also remember history, and if you have to deal with a Nebuchadnezzar to-day you may have to deal with a Cyrus to-morrow. One cannot tell what may happen in the Turkish Empire. In the present circumstances you should leave His Majesty the Sultan alone for the moment. You should convince him that the movement is a perfectly straightforward and honest movement. It is not intended to go in for any political intrigue. You are not so foolish as to suppose you can hoodwink the Sultan, because you know perfectly well he is a very able man, and informs himself on every subject that concerns his interests and those of his empire. But, at the same time, I urge you to be ready. The Palestine question must be raised some day, and then European statesmen will enquire what claim you have. Will you be able to answer that you are the inhabitants of the country? If you do not set up a claim, someone else will try and obtain the land for themselves. Zion-

ism must be established in Jerusalem, and you must not quarrel, or the whole movement will come to grief. I remember that not so very long ago the whole of the British Empire was governed by a Jew. If a man of that ability could be found who could govern a people not his own, and govern a particularly stubborn people such as the English, I do not see why it should be impossible for the Jews to govern a country not larger than Wales. I would not press for autonomy at the present time. Whatever money there is, whatever enthusiasm and desire to work there is; I would attempt to turn the whole of it into Palestine. You should not make any distinctions, but you should help everyone in Palestine. You should make the movement something that will unite you together into a single nation. I would not confine myself to agricultural colonization, but all poor Jews should be helped to earn a living in Palestine. And I would take the young people and bring them up in useful handicrafts or agricul-

ture, so that, in time, you may become the dominant people in Palestine. I think I have said everything I can suggest on this subject. Your claim to the country will be the amount of work you have done. It is no use talking and no use making speeches and holding meetings; what is wanted is work. If nothing is done the movement will die out, but if a steady attempt is made to lay the foundations of the future, I think Zionism, whose development I have watched from the beginning, will grow into a fact. I have only one word to say in conclusion. I most sincerely believe that in the time of this present generation one of two things will happen. Either you will become a people, scattered, no doubt, over the whole surface of the world, but with a home you can turn to as the home of the race, or you will be swallowed up in the nations amongst whom you dwell, and there will be no Israel at all.

(The End).

